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SUBJECT: CANDIDATE REGISTRATION: WHAT IS HAPPENING (AND NOT) AT THE TOP OF THE TICKETS

REF: A. KABUL 371

[1](#)B. KABUL 956

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Afghanistan's presidential hopefuls are scanning political circles in search of running mates to fill the two vice presidential slots on their tickets, apparently unaware or unconcerned with a rapidly approaching April 25-May 8 registration period, at which time candidates will be required to commit to their vice presidential picks and resolve renunciations of foreign citizenship. No dual national Americans rumored to be contesting the election have come to the Embassy yet to renounce their citizenship. Moreover, with less than one week remaining until the beginning of candidate registration, no candidate - including Karzai - has revealed his running mates. Once the filing deadline passes, candidate tickets are locked in for the entire election period. If a second-round runoff is necessary, candidates will not be able to realign to form stronger tickets. Thus, we expect candidates may nominate relatively unknown running mates. This could mean even less relevance for the vice presidential offices and diminished chances for candidates to forge multi-ethnic governing coalitions. End Summary.

The Afghan Vice Presidencies

[1](#)2. (SBU) Similar to the US system, the Afghan Constitution assigns little official role for the vice presidents beyond assuming the presidency in the absence of the incumbent. Karzai has restricted the vice presidents' ability to act as president when he is out of the country, in large part due to an intense political rivalry between Karzai and First VP Ahmed Zia Massoud (ref A). Karzai has better relations with Second VP Karim Khalili, an important strategic liaison with Hazara communities and Iran. Karzai has directed both vice presidents to oversee cross-cutting issues in the Cabinet (e.g. Massoud handling economics and Khalili refugee repatriation). Both have complained that the lack of their own budget authority has minimized their influence.

[1](#)3. (U) The more practical role of the vice presidents has been to attract ethnic votes for their running mate. Many credit Khalili for drawing enough Hazara votes to help Karzai clear the 50 percent barrier for a first-round victory in 2004, though most analysts doubt Massoud attracted Tajik votes that wouldn't have gone to Karzai otherwise. In 2004, the major non-Pashtun candidates concentrated on demonstrating their popularity among their own ethnic group, helping Karzai and his pan-ethnic slate top Yunus Qanooni, the Tajik runner up, by 38 points. But in 2009, all major candidates have spoken of the need to forge a majority coalition from among the country's ethnic minorities. Rumored iterations of various presidential slates almost always consist of a Pashtun president, Tajik Vice President, and Hazara or Uzbek Second Vice President. United Front candidate Abdullah Abdullah, who has mixed Pashtun/Tajik heritage, is reportedly seeking a Pashtun First Vice President running mate to help bolster his appeal to Pashtuns.

Registration Deadline Fast Approaching

¶4. (U) Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission regulations require candidates to register their full ticket (themselves and their VP running mates) when they file their paperwork. The registration period runs from April 25-May 8. IEC Deputy Chief Technical Officer Zekriya Barakzai informed us that regulations will require presidential and vice presidential candidates to appear together and in person at the IEC headquarters in Kabul to register their ticket.

¶5. (SBU) According to the Constitution, all candidates (including VP nominees) must renounce non-Afghan citizenships before they file to run. Some campaigns have confided the names of wealthy or connected dual national Americans as running mates under consideration. Our consular section, however, has not processed any requests to renounce citizenship from the rumored candidates. In the case of US citizens, loss of citizenship occurs only after CA/L has reviewed and approved relevant forms, and not on the date of the renunciation oath.

Candidates Aim Big, But Come Up Mostly Empty Handed

¶6. (U) With less than three weeks to go before the registration deadline, no candidate has been willing to give up his shot at the presidency and settle for a vice presidential position. Because the registration process locks in VP candidates for the entire election period, candidates

KABUL 00000994 002 OF 002

who make it to a second round of voting cannot use the VP positions to barter for support from candidates eliminated in the first round.

¶7. (U) United Front leaders have actively courted the major Pashtun opposition candidates (Anwarulhaq Ahadi, Ashraf Ghani, Ahmed Ali Jalali, Gul Aqa Sherzai, and Mirwais Yaseni) to drop their campaigns and run on a unity ticket headed by former Foreign Minister Abdullah. Those candidates have responded with their own offers, but with themselves at the top of the ticket. Sherzai campaign manager Khalid Pashtun confided to PolOff that Sherzai had tried to break Lower House Speaker Qanooni away from the UF to run as Sherzai's First Vice President. Qanooni supposedly toyed with the idea for weeks, finally rejecting it last week as Abdullah emerged as the UF's official nominee (ref B). Sherzai is now considering a handful of relatively unknown running mates, including some with American citizenship.

Karzai Most Skilled at Vice Presidential Sweepstakes

¶8. (U) As a favorite for re-election, Karzai has had the most luck courting vice presidential aspirants. It is almost certain Karzai will drop Massoud. We and most observers expect he will ask UF co-founder Marshall Fahim to run as his First VP candidate, in an attempt to carve in to the UF's advantage among Tajiks. We expect Khalili will stay on as Karzai's running mate for Second VP, although all campaigns, including Karzai's, have at times tried to woo influential Hazara leader Mohammed Mohaqqueq. Mohaqqueq has told some he is inclined to join Abdullah's campaign, but has held off on making a firm commitment to the UF.

¶9. (U) In contrast to American politics, most Afghan candidates are not turning to parliamentarians or governors for their running mates, despite strategies to shore up ethnic and regional support. Nearly all governors are Karzai loyalists. The few who are not are hesitant to resign their lucrative positions to join uncertain opposition campaigns, while the handful of rumored running mates from Parliament, such as Mohaqqueq, owe their influence more to pre-democratic

experiences as warlords than to legislative prowess.

Consequences of a Low-Profile Vice Presidency

¶10. (SBU) With most of the big names in Afghan politics locked into their own campaigns or uninterested in serving as vice president, it is likely many candidates will register with relatively unknown running mates. As mentioned above, the registration rules preclude last-minute ticket forming. A president could force a VP to resign and nominate a replacement shortly after inauguration as part of a back-room deal. But any new VP nominee would require confirmation by the Lower House, which relishes its spoiler role. To build political coalitions, particularly in the event of a runoff vote, it will be more likely that campaigns will negotiate Cabinet positions and other power-sharing arrangements, further diminishing the relevance of the two vice presidencies. However, no matter how irrelevant the vice presidencies become under these political circumstances, they will retain their primary constitutional responsibility: to assume the presidency in the event of the death or resignation of the incumbent. For that reason, we hope that the current candidates pay close attention to the qualifications and suitability of their vice presidential choices.

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